



Speech notes – Graeme Mundine
Witness to the Gospel in Modern Australia Conference
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Acknowledge that we are on Aboriginal land – the land of the Dharug people.

My people have a long history of relationship with missionaries in this country.

For us there are two sides to the mission story

Missionaries brought Jesus to us. We already knew about God, but we didn't know about Jesus and that was good. They thought we didn't know about God, but we did, we called it by a different name, but we always had God in our lives. But we didn't know about this fella called Jesus.

The other side of the story though is that Missionaries weren't just peddling the story of Jesus, they were also peddling Western Culture and that was a tragedy for us. It took away our culture, our languages, our kinship systems and our land.

Of course the missionaries also saved many of our lives. If it weren't for being rounded up into missions it would have been much easier for people to come through and shoot us as did happen in many places. And so even though there were many hard times and missionaries did cause much harm, they also in the context of the times offered us some protection. However cruel that protection may have been!

What has been problematic with the idea of mission is that it has only brought western style church. It has brought to us a church created in Western, European culture and preached to a non western society.

But mission needs to meet people where they are at. I am talking about inculturation here.



Aborigines have been affected by missions. And Christianity has been a major force in our lives. 97 % of Aborigines claim to be Christian.

And Here I'm standing now.

I come from a background of being missioned TO and now I am part of the mission force and evangelizing - not only those who are unchurched, but also those who are churched and remind them about Jesus Christ and the message of hope he brought to all.

Now we Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christians can stand alongside you and partner with you and mission together. We have our own ministers and theologians. Now we can take our place in the life of the Christian churches and be fully part of the church in Australia. And you can and must learn from us.

Pope John Paul II in his speech to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Peoples in 1986 made the statement:

"The Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others."

He is clearly stating that a) we do indeed have a contribution and that b) it must be joyfully received. And this means to me that we must be joyfully received as cultural people, with our own ways of being Church and that those ways of being Church will enrich us all, not just Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In that speech he also made comment about the social situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. You could read that speech now and sadly, 20 years later his comments about the injustices that my people face are the same.

20 years after the Pope called us as Church to joyfully receive our contribution this is the state of affairs in Australia:



The average life expectancy for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander man is 59 years or about 18 years less than non – Indigenous men.

The leading cause of death for women in the Northern Territory is from homicide. It is a national disgrace that more women are being murdered in the Northern Territory than are being killed from accidents or ill health.

It is also a national disgrace that our babies are twice as likely to die before they reach their first birthday.

Our men are 2.6 times more likely to kill themselves and our women twice as likely. Our men are 10 times more likely to have diabetes and our women 7 times more likely.

Our unemployment rate is three times higher than that of non – Indigenous people.

NATSIEC is trying to highlight the poverty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through its campaign called Make Indigenous Poverty History. Because with all the campaigning on Millennium Development Goals and alleviating poverty for the poorest of the poor, we must not forget that Indigenous peoples around the world are the poorest of the poor. They always score the lowest on all key social and economic indicators. And this is true here in Australia.

And so as missionaries and evangelizing people we must tell the story of social injustice where it arises in our communities. We must work where people are at and we must address inequality within our culture.

Today we are hopefully more aware that when we are missioning we must be careful not to destroy people's lives. We are hopefully more aware that whilst the church has always seen mission as an important part of its function, the Church must also own that it is not always good and it can be destructive.

The Western way is not the only way. The White way is not the only way. You have much to learn about us and you have to learn about your own culture and understand that it is a culture – it is not the yardstick from which all other cultures should be measured. Being White is not the standard. It's just another way of being.



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Jesus drew from his own culture and built on it. He used what was around him at that time and in that place to draw from for his stories and teachings. And so too must we draw on our own cultures.

If there really is to be an Australian Church we must draw on ancient ways of doing things for us to be truly the church that Jesus wants it to be.